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April 23, 1959

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Evaluation of the Unofficial Visit
to Washington by Prime Minister
Fidel Castro of Cuba



Prime Minister Fidel Castro came to Washington on the evening of April 15 at the invitation of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. He departed on April 20 for Princeton University, New York and Harvard University, en route to Canada, from whence he is scheduled to return to Cuba on April 26. During his stay in the capital his three principal appearances were before the ASNE, the National Press Club, and on the television program, "Meet the Press".

Recognition of Castro's official position was shown by the presence of the Chief of Protocol and the Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs on various occasions. Also, I was host at a luncheon in his honor and he was received by the Vice President for a two and one-half hour private visit.

A tentative evaluation of the results of the visit is enclosed with this memorandum.

Christian A. Herter

Enclosure:

Tentative Evaluation of
Castro Visit.

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By DDH ME DATE 12/12/76

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Subject: Unofficial Visit of Prime Minister
Castro of Cuba to Washington - A.
Tentative Evaluation

april 23, 1959

In the Department's opinion the Castro who came to Washington was a man on his best behavior who carefully followed the advice of his accompanying Ministers and accepted the direction of an American public relations expert. The result achieved by Castro in terms of a favorable reception by the public and the information media may therefore be considered as contrived. At the same time, we should not underestimate the effect on Castro of the friendliness and openness of the American people and officials and their willingness to hear his plea for understanding of the Cuban revolution. When he departed from Washington for Princeton on April 20 he was certainly warmer in manner toward the Department officials who bade him farewell than he was in his greeting to them upon his arrival.

A preliminary analysis of the result of his Washington visit indicates that:

(a) By his apparent frankness and sincerity he succeeded in allaying much of the criticism which had arisen against him in the general press and public.

(b) With regard to his position on communism and the cold war struggle Castro cautiously indicated that Cuba would remain in the western camp. However his position here must still be regarded as uncertain. He did go sufficiently far in his declarations to be vulnerable to the criticism of the radicals among his supporters, and his future course may be indicated by the manner in which he handles them upon his return to Cuba.

(c) There is a probability that the land reform program which Castro considers to be the essential key to the future well-being of the Cuban people may adversely affect certain American-owned properties in Cuba. We may also have increased difficulties with regard to the United States Government-owned Nicaro Nickel Plant. Castro made it clear, however, that he has no desire to create any issue with regard to our Guantanamo Naval Base.

(d) From his speeches and statements it is evident that Castro is much more concerned with ends than means and that he does not have the same idea of law and legality as we have in the United States. He appears to confuse the roar of mass audiences with the rule of the majority in his concept of democracy.

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On balance,

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On balance, despite Castro's apparent simplicity, sincerity and eagerness to reassure the United States public, there is little probability that Castro has altered the essentially radical course of his revolution. From his experience here he has gained a valuable knowledge of American public reaction which may make him a more difficult man to deal with on his return to Cuba. It would be a serious mistake to underestimate this man. With all his appearance of naiveté, unsophistication and ignorance on many matters, he is clearly a strong personality and a born leader of great personal courage and conviction. While we certainly know him better than before, Castro remains an enigma and we should await his decisions on specific matters before assuming a more optimistic view than heretofore about the possibility of developing a constructive relationship with him and his government.



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